

**Proclamation 7061—Wright Brothers Day, 1997**

*December 16, 1997*

*By the President of the United States of America*

**A Proclamation**

On December 17, 1903, Orville Wright lay inside the first heavier-than-air powered craft that permitted controlled flight. His brother Wilbur stood nearby, steadying the craft at one wing tip. In a few moments, the brothers would know if their years of hard work and painstaking experimentation would finally bear fruit. With Wilbur running beside the plane to build its momentum, Orville achieved, for a scant 12 seconds over a distance of 120 feet, what humankind had always dreamed of—he flew.

That historic moment marked the first step in a long journey through the skies that would ultimately take Americans beyond Earth's atmosphere and into space. The Mars Pathfinder spacecraft that captured the world's attention and imagination this past summer reflects the same American ingenuity and pioneering spirit that sent the Wrights' fragile craft aloft so briefly over Kitty Hawk almost a century ago. With unwavering perseverance in the face of many failures, steady conviction in the possibility of flight, and a determination to bring their vision to reality, the Wright brothers expanded our horizons and also brought the world closer together.

We are still reaping the benefits of their extraordinary achievement. America's aerospace industry has experienced enormous growth and development since the Wright brothers' first flight. It has strengthened our economy, created new business and recreational opportunities, freed us from many of the limits of time and distance, and made our Nation's aviation system the finest in the world. And thanks in large part to the efforts of the men and women throughout the Federal Government—in the Departments of Transportation and Defense, the National Transportation Safety Board, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—that system is also the safest in the world.

The Congress, by a joint resolution approved December 17, 1963 (77 Stat. 402; 36 U.S.C. 169), has designated December 17 of each year as "Wright Brothers Day" and has authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation inviting the people of the United States to observe that day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

**Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton,** President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim December 17, 1997, as Wright Brothers Day.

**In Witness Whereof,** I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-second.

**William J. Clinton**

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NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on December 18.

**Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Space Medal of Honor Posthumously to Roger B. Chaffee and Edward H. White II**

*December 17, 1997*

Dr. Gibbons, Mr. Goldin, Congressman Sensenbrenner, to Edward White and the White family, and Martha Chaffee and the Chaffee family, and Mrs. Grissom, other representatives of astronauts' families that are here.

A generation ago, President Kennedy challenged our Nation and asked God's blessing to undertake the most hazardous and dangerous and greatest adventure on which man has ever embarked. His challenge in 1961 to send a man to the moon and bring him safely back to Earth by the end of the decade captured the imagination of millions of people around the world. A group of pioneering Americans recognized the limitless possibilities of this seemingly impossible challenge, and they would risk their lives to make it happen.

Two great Americans we honor today, Lieutenant Commander Roger Chaffee and Lieutenant Colonel Edward White, were among them. More than 30 years ago, these two men, along with their commander, Virgil "Gus" Grissom, were selected for the very first Apollo mission. Tragedy struck before they could achieve their goal. On January 27, 1967, fire swept through the Apollo capsule during a training session, killing all three of them. In 1978 President Carter presented Commander Grissom with one of the first Congressional Space Medals of Honor. Today I have the privilege of presenting the same medal to his crewmates, Roger Chaffee and Edward White, courageous men who gave their lives in our Nation's effort to conquer the frontiers of space.

Even before they joined the Apollo program, Chaffee and White had already served our Nation with great distinction. Born in Texas and a member of the United States Air Force, Colonel White was the first American to walk in space. At a White House ceremony soon afterward, President Johnson called him "one of the Christopher Columbuses of our century."

Commander Chaffee was a Michigan native and a decorated Navy pilot. Though he was the rookie of the crew, he didn't lack self-confidence. He once said, "Hell, I'd feel secure taking it up all by myself."

Today we bestow upon Roger Chaffee and Edward White the highest honor in America's space program, but they were honored in our hearts long ago. Their deaths will remind us always that exploring space is dangerous, life-threatening work, work that demands and deserves the bravest and best among us. Though they never got there, astronauts Chaffee, White, and Grissom's footprints are on the Moon. Their presence is felt on every mission of our space shuttle program. Their spirits live on in every successful launch and every safe return. And I'm certain they will be there when the international space station goes into orbit.

America has become the world's leading spacefaring nation because of the selfless pioneering spirits of the men we honor today. I am proud to present these medals to the families of Roger Chaffee and Edward

White. On behalf of a grateful Nation, I thank them for their sacrifice.

Now I'd like to ask the military aide to read the citations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Edward H. White, III, son of Lt. Col. White; Martha Chaffee, widow of Lt. Comdr. Chaffee; and Betty Grissom, widow of Lt. Col. Virgil Grissom.

### **Remarks on the Peace Process in Bosnia and an Exchange With Reporters**

*December 18, 1997*

**The President.** Good morning. I want to speak with you today about the progress we have made toward a lasting peace in Bosnia and the challenges that still must be faced in order to finish the job.

For nearly 4 years, Bosnia was the battleground for the bloodiest war in Europe since World War II. The conflict killed or wounded one out of every 10 Bosnians. It drove half the country's people from their homes, left 9 out of 10 of them unemployed. We will never be able to forget the mass graves, the women and young girls victimized by systematic campaigns of rape, skeletal prisoners locked behind barbed-wire fences, endless lines of refugees marching toward a future of despair.

The war in Bosnia was abhorrent to our values. It also threatened our national interests. We've learned the hard way in this century that Europe's stability and America's security are joined. The war threatened to explode into a broader conflict in the Balkans, endangering the vital interests of allies like Greece and Turkey and undermining our efforts to build a peaceful, undivided, and democratic Europe.

Then, 2 years ago in Dayton, Ohio, American leadership helped to end the war in Bosnia. With our allies in NATO and others, we launched an extraordinary military and political effort to implement the peace agreement. Twenty-four months later, by almost any measure, the lives of Bosnia's people are better, and their hopes for the future are brighter.